

CU men's preview: Nov. 23 vs. Alcorn St.

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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TODAY: The Buffs (1-2) return home to host Alcorn State (0-3) at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television on FSN with Tom Helmer (play by play), Ceal Barry (analyst) and Alanna Rizzo (sideline). Radio on KKZN (AM 760) with Mark Johnson (play by play) and Chris Lewis (analyst).

STORY LINES: The Buffs are coming off back-to-back road losses at Georgia and San Francisco. ... Alec Burks and Cory Higgins combined for 57 points in the 83-81 overtime loss to the Dons, but head coach Tad Boyle is not impressed with the way anyone on the team plays defense. ... Alcorn State has opened the season with blowout losses at Texas A&M, Houston and Purdue. The Braves still have seven more road games to go before SWAC play begins.

COACHES: Boyle is 1-2 in his first season at CU after going 56-66 in four seasons at Northern Colorado. Larry Smith is 8-55 in his third season at Alcorn State.

PROBABLE STARTERS: **Colorado** -- (2009-10 statistics) G Shannon Sharpe, 6-1, Fr., 1.7 ppg, 1.0 rpg; G Levi Knutson, 6-4, Sr., 10.7 ppg, 3.7 rpg; G Alec Burks, 6-6, SO., 23.3 ppg, 3.3 rpg; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, Sr., 19.7 ppg, 5.0 rpg; F Andre Roberson, 6-7, Fr., 3.7 ppg, 7.7 rpg. **Alcorn State** -- G Kendrick McDonald, 5-10, Jr., 12.7 ppg, 1.7 apg; G Tony Eackles, 6-2, Jr., 7.0 ppg, 3.0 rpg; F Keith Searcy, 6-4, So., 5.0 ppg, 2.7 rpg; F Korey Sanders, 6-8, Fr., 2.0 ppg, 2.0 rpg; F Chris Davenport, 6-6, Jr., 6.3 ppg, 1.7 rpg.

KEY STAT: Burks and Higgins have combined to make 50 of 64 free throws (78.1 percent) this season. The rest of the team is 20-for-33 (60.6 percent) at the line.

SERIES: First meeting.

UP NEXT: The Buffs return will continue the search for a road breakthrough on Sunday at Harvard (11 a.m., no television).

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Cory Higgins troubled by CU Buffs' slow start

CU aims to right ship after two road losses

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Cory Higgins is the face of Colorado basketball right now.

And right now that face is scarred, angry and focused.

The Buffs' senior leader is determined to turn things around after bitter road losses at Georgia and San Francisco.

"I think it's both a wake-up call and troubling," said Higgins, who needed four stitches after suffering a nasty cut on his forehead during the heartbreaker against the Dons. "By now we should have turned the corner. We have enough veteran players. I guess we're still learning and looking for something to click with everybody."

The Buffs (1-2) overcame a 17-point deficit in Athens, Ga., a week ago before allowing the talented Bulldogs to retake control in the final minutes.

On Saturday night, CU erased a six-point deficit in the final two minutes of overtime and took a lead on a three-point play by Higgins with 10 seconds left, only to allow San Francisco to tie the score with a put-back. The Dons won the game at the line when the visitors were called for a technical foul after signaling for a timeout they didn't have.

Tad Boyle said film of the game revealed that the controversial call was the correct call. The first-year CU head coach also noted that his team should have been in better position in the final moments of both losses.

"When the game is on the line and times are tough, you know Cory is going to be there. He's going to compete, he's a competitor, and he's not the only one," Boyle said. "This group has shown a lot of grit and resiliency. ... It shouldn't have come down to the last few minutes at Georgia or San Francisco. Until we figure that out, we're going to be in a lot of those games."

Boyle was still undecided Monday about a starting lineup for tonight's game against Alcorn State at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., FSN). After the loss at San Francisco he vowed to put his five best defenders on the floor based on film study.

Shannon Sharpe, Levi Knutson and Andre Roberson -- who have played well off the bench -- have been among the team's best defenders, along with Higgins. But entering Monday's games, Buffs ranked 261st nationally in rebounding.

"The last possession of the game we got the stop, the next part is getting the rebound. Both of those go hand-in-hand," Sharpe said. "We're capable. We're still getting used to the system, but that's no excuse. We just have to do it."

Offensively, CU is averaging 81 points through three games, led by Alec Burks (23.3 ppg) and Higgins (19.7). Boyle has also inherited a group that is easy to coach and believes the Buffs are capable of turning things around defensively.

"Every one of these young men are a joy to be around every day. It's not like I come to practice thinking, 'Oh man, I've got to coach this guy today?'" Boyle said. "I don't feel like that about any of them and I'm not sure I've been around a team where I've felt like that about the whole group."

"With that being said, we have to do what we're supposed to do on the court. And that has been a challenge."

Higgins -- who had 28 points, eight rebounds and two blocks against San Francisco -- is up to the challenge.

"I could just get a sense from him in the airport (on Sunday) flying home that he wasn't real happy," Boyle said. "Cory is a guy who doesn't say a lot, but you can read a lot about his feelings with his body language and facial expressions. Losing bothers him, and it should bother him as a senior."

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